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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ANKARA 000985

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/02/2019
TAGS: PREL, PARM, MARR, TU
SUBJECT: GEN PETRAEUS VISITS ANKARA, FINDS BROAD AGREEMENT
ON TOUGHEST ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Jeffrey for reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

1. (S) During a June 30 - July 1 visit to Turkey, CENTCOM Commander GEN David Petraeus found broad agreement on and readiness to cooperate with the USG approach in Afghanistan, Pakistan and, generally speaking, Iraq. Turkey was already working to increase further its commitment to Afghanistan, both in civilian and military areas, including taking on leadership of a new PRT. In Pakistan, Turkey has sought to mentor the Pakistan Army -- for which it had great respect --

and to share lessons learned on how to transform its forces to conduct counterinsurgency operations. On Iraq, CHOD Basbug pressed for U.S. kinetic action against PKK targets, even if only for symbolic, political value, and for the U.S. to pressure the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) to take action as well. Basbug repeatedly requested that U.S. Predator unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) supporting his troops be able to provide laser designation. GEN Petraeus responded by noting that our intel support for Turkish strikes already enabled significant progress and urging that there were opportunities for Turkey to take further political, economic, and social actions that might have greater impact on the PKK than kinetic approaches. Turks expressed concern about Iranian influence in Iraq and the desire that Iraq remain a single political entity after the U.S. drawdown, shared views on how to engage the fractured Iraqi polity to encourage leaders to continue to reach across sectarian lines, and pledged to continue to work to engage with Kurdish leaders. All warned, however, that it would be difficult to continue to engage with the KRG if it did not take some concrete action against the PKK. GEN Petraeus praised GOT work to make its counterinsurgency a "whole-of-government" approach, reaching beyond kinetic operations. He agreed to press KRG leaders to take action, but cautioned that Turkey should be more realistic in its expectations of what steps the KRG would take. On Syria, GEN Petraeus cautioned against unconditional engagement; if Syria really wants to engage with the West, it must bring to a stop all support to Al Qaeda facilitators operating in Syria with the knowledge of Syrian Intelligence. The visit took place in an extraordinarily cordial and collegial atmosphere, and the Turks greatly appreciated being engaged and consulted at this level. End Summary.

2. (S) GEN Petraeus was welcomed warmly during his June 30 - July 1 visit to Ankara. DCM hosted the CENTCOM Commander to a dinner attended by President Gul's and Prime Minister Erdogan's top foreign policy advisors, a senior MP, leaders in Turkey's MFA, and one of Turkey's wisest thinktankers. GEN Petraeus visited U.S. intel specialists at the U.S. - Turkey Combined Intelligence Fusion Center (where the U.S. shares real-time, actionable intelligence with Turkey to help combat PKK terrorism), met at length with Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and his team, and was then hosted by the Chief of Turkey's General Staff GEN Ilker Basbug and J3 LtGen Nusret Tasdeler. GEN Petraeus spoke briefly at a press "stakeout" at the airport, and, with the exception of one pro-Kurdish outlet, his visit was reported in a positive and straightforward manner.

IRAQ

3. (C) GEN Petraeus reviewed for his Turkish interlocutors the current state of affairs in Iraq. He was careful to point out that the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraqi cities had begun long before the June 30 deadline, and that CENTCOM had been passing responsibility for security in cities, towns, and villages gradually and responsibly to Iraqi Security Forces for months. He cautioned against allowing recent, sensational attacks in Iraq to distract from the broad view of the security situation. GEN Petraeus shared data with the Turks which showed that the marked improvement in Iraqi security since the "surge" continued. He also noted that while combat units were no longer operating in Iraqi cities, those units would continue to provide security to the approaches to urban areas and U.S. advisory teams would continue to assist Iraqi Security Forces from Joint Coordination Centers in Baghdad, Basrah, and Mosul.

4. (C) Turkish CHOD GEN Basbug acknowledged significant

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progress against the PKK since we started sharing intel and Predator downlink with them in Nov 2007. Basbug, however, sees a narrow window of opportunity for decisive action against the PKK in Iraq -- to eliminate them while U.S. forces are still in Iraq. Basbug stated that the Turkish General Staff was thankful for what we have done, but added that it was not enough. He expects the U.S. to continue what it is doing and to do more. He pressed GEN Petraeus repeatedly for the U.S. to take several actions: 1) pressure KRG leaders Massood and Nechirvan Barzani to have Kurdish Peshmerga take military action to interdict PKK supplies and target assembly locations; 2) allow laser designation from Predators flying in support of TU troops (the topic which, it seems, he sees as a political litmus test -- and Amb Jeffrey agreed to work this with State and the Interagency); and 3) push "terrorists" from the UN Turkish Kurd refugee camp at Makhmour. GEN Petraeus pushed back and urged Basbug to be realistic in how much the U.S. could pressure KRG leaders and offered his belief that Turkish political, social, economic, and cultural initiatives (a "whole-of-government" approach) might have a more decisive effect than additional (marginally effective) kinetic actions on the PKK at this point.

5. (C) Beyond that, GEN Petraeus encouraged Basbug to

leverage Turkey's \$10 Billion investment in northern Iraq to pressure Barzani, et al; to figure out how the PKK is funded (to include asking NATO partners about funds from their countries going to the PKK); to work with the UN through the Iraq-Turkey-U.S. Tri-lateral to get Makhmour refugee camp closed (eliminating it as a potential haven and recruiting source for the PKK); and to request limited security tasks be executed by Peshmerga such as blocking specific PKK supply routes (and then build on those). Basbug expressed gratitude for the intel support, acknowledging that it had transformed the fight against the PKK, but he again returned to the U.S. doing more and again pressed for laser designation by supporting U.S. UAVs.

6. (C) GEN Basbug invited GEN Petraeus to visit again in order to address the Turkish Staff College and share his insights into counterinsurgency operations. FM Davutoglu expressed hope that the upcoming visit to the U.S. of Deputy PM Cicek -- who will soon take on the leadership of Turkey's "whole-of-government" approach -- would be a good opportunity for the USG to share ideas on counterinsurgency.

7. (C) FM Davutoglu noted that he was very pleased with the level of U.S.-Turkish relations, especially after the visits by Secretary Clinton and President Obama. Davutoglu expressed concern that the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq must not be seen to create a vacuum of power. Davutoglu painted two scenarios that worried him with respect to Iran. The first was that Iran would fill the vacuum caused by the U.S. withdrawal and that this would result in a Shia government in Baghdad that rejects Sunnis and Kurds and is, in turn, rejected by Iraq's regional neighbors. Davutoglu's second scenario (perhaps even triggered by the first) would be a split in the Shia-Kurd coalition and Kurdish independence. He assessed that the next two years would be critical in Turkey's efforts to keep the Kurds linked to Baghdad. GEN Petraeus credited Turkey with being the first to really engage with the Government of Iraq and lauded Turkey's efforts to reach across sectarian lines (particularly to support the passage of last year's U.S.-Iraq Strategic Agreement). Davutoglu recognized the challenges of working with Iraq at this stage of its development, and pledged to continue to work to engage in Iraq, despite setbacks like the GOI's recent attempt to restrict his travel during a visit to Iraq which was to have taken place last week, and promote further reconciliation. Davutoglu expressed concern that whatever Turkey negotiates with the Iraqi Army or with the Central Government in Baghdad might be largely irrelevant because those institutions are largely not present in the KRG provinces in northern Iraq. He was generally upbeat about

democratic progress in Iraq, however, and was pleased that the last elections showed divisions not along sectarian lines, but on political issues like how strong the central government should be. Turkey, Davutoglu asserted, would continue to seek opportunities to encourage the development of multi-ethnic political formations, with a goal of an Iraqi electorate from Tal Afar to Diyala divided along the lines of political ideology and issues rather than along ethnic or sectarian lines.

IRAN

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8. (C) Turkey's foreign policy leaders expressed concern about Iran's drive for nuclear weapons, said that this goal had become a nationalist ideal for Iran and generally agreed that it would be impossible at this point to change this fact. What was possible, however, was that the international community, through closer diplomatic and political engagement, could defer Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. The attendees at dinner on 30 June, however, did not envision a direct threat to Turkey from Iranian nuclear-armed missiles but, instead, considered malign Iranian influence in Iraq as a more serious threat to Turkish interests. All praised President Obama's stated goal of outreach, and hoped that progress on this track could continue once the dust had settled from the election and the government's thuggish reaction to protests.

SYRIA

9. (C) FM Davutoglu was effusive in his praise for the U.S. decision to take steps toward engaging Syria, and said that Turkey admires President Obama's comprehensive, inclusive strategy for the region. GEN Petraeus replied that while some steps had been taken, this should not be seen as rapprochement but as dialogue. He asserted that the Syrian regime needed to cease forthwith its support for Al Qaeda facilitators running foreign fighters into Iraq or no progress could be made. Petraeus said that Syria's current policy made no sense; he likened the SARG's actions to keeping and feeding poisonous snakes in one's backyard so that they would attack your neighbor; what was to stop these snakes from attacking one's own children? Davutoglu repeated his view that the U.S. should continue dialogue with the

Syrian government: "Even if all you want to do is threaten someone, you still have to talk to them."

10. (C) MFA Deputy Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu told GEN Petraeus that he believed it was now possible to draw Syria away from Iran. There was broad consensus across the Arab world in perceiving Iran, and increased Iranian influence, as a threat to Arabs; as a result, he suggested that the Syrian people would reach a point where Syria's engagement with Iran would be tolerated less. MFA Special Envoy for Iraq Murat Ozcelik said that to succeed, we needed to take steps which would show Syrians that there is value to their daily lives in being with us.

Afghanistan / Pakistan

11. (C) As he had in past meetings with Special Envoy Holbrooke, FM Davutoglu stressed that non-military activities should be a greater part of our joint strategy in Afghanistan and said that Turkey was working hard to increase its role. He outlined some of the efforts which Turkey was taking on, including specialized police training both in Afghanistan and Turkey. Davutoglu said he had just returned from the region and proudly reported about the work that Turkey's civilian workers -- including women teachers far outside of the security zone -- were doing. Petraeus thanked Turkey for its increased contribution to international efforts in Afghanistan, including for the offer made earlier in the week to lead a new Provincial Reconstruction Team in northern Afghanistan. GEN Petraeus agreed strongly that Turkey's ability to use its soft power in both Afghanistan and Pakistan was invaluable; he expressed U.S. support for Turkish efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He also described the ongoing increase in U.S. forces, the U.S. "civilian surge" for Afghanistan which was beginning, and outlined U.S.-funded construction activity.

12. (C) Davutoglu said that Turkey was particularly well placed to mentor Pakistan. Turkey had great respect for Pakistan's army, but all recognize that it needed help in transforming from a military intended for large conventional warfare to one able to conduct effective counterinsurgency operations. He assessed that while Pakistani military officers might be hesitant to engage with other NATO Allies, they always seemed to feel very much at ease with their Turkish counterparts. GEN Petraeus agreed, and said that the work he saw going on in the U.S.-Turkey Combined Intelligence Fusion Center could have real application for Pakistan. GEN Petraeus briefed all of his Turkish interlocutors that he was

more heartened by what he had seen in recent weeks in Pakistan than he had been on any previous occasion over the past year. There is now broad consensus across Pakistan's institutions and in its population that the Pakistan Taliban and Al Qaeda represent an existential threat to Pakistan; the Army's fight against these extremist threats is no longer seen by the Pakistani people as acting as a proxy for the U.S., and popular and clerical support for the Army has translated into more effective operations on the ground in Northwest Frontier Province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

13. (C) GEN Petraeus was received with genuine warmth. Turkey's leaders respond very well to this sort of top-level engagement and consultation. GEN Petraeus cleared this cable.

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JEFFREY